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SUBJECT Walker Spy Trial

PETER JENNINGS: On Friday, we reported that a deal was in the works for John Walker and his son to plead guilty of passing military secrets to the Soviet Union. And it has happened.

The bargain that was struck suggests that the former naval officer who betrayed his country was, in the end, at least, loyal to his son.

Here's ABC's Dennis Trout.

DENNIS TROUTE: John Walker was smiling as he left jail this morning for his court appearance in Baltimore. In court, Judge Alexander Harvey had the elder Walker step forward, flanked by his two attorneys. Asked for his plea to a new conspiracy charge and two other espionage counts, Walker responded in a quiet voice "Guilty."

Under terms of the deal struck for his guilty plea, John Walker gets a life term, though he's eligible for parole in ten years. His son, Michael, also entering guilty pleas, gets a 25 year prison sentence, though he may be paroled in eight.

Defense attorney Fred Bennett insisted the elder Walker's belated sense of responsibility for the son he coaxed into the spy business made him come to terms with the government.

Revealing the evidence against both of them, U. S. Attorney Michael Shwartz furnished new details about the espionage ring. He said John Walker's former wife, Barbara, first learned of it in 1968 when she discovered maps, photos and money in his desk. Prosecutors revealed that 22 year old Michael

confessed to his role in the spy ring just after the case broke in May.

In accepting the plea bargain, Judge Harvey noted that he can change his mind and force them to stand trial any way if John Walker breaks his promise to testify against other spies and to help the government discover just how much damage he did.

Defense attorney Bennett insists that Walker's sense of regret will keep the deal on course.

REPORTER: Has he said he's sorry?

FRED BENNETT: Yes, he has to me. Now I can't bring him out here right now and have him, in front of everybody on nationwide TV, say the same thing, because he's in the lock-up. But he has told me that. Yes.

TROUTE: Perhaps sorrier still, Michael Walker's wife, Rachel, and his sister, Margaret.

REPORTER: How do you feel today?

RACHEL WALKER: I think the best thing that's possible was done under the circumstances.

TROUTE: Another real loser in this is Jerry Whitworth, the other alleged Walker spy ring co-conspirator facing trial in California next January.

What's been described as a circumstantial case against him is strengthened greatly now by John Walker's agreement to help the prosecution.

Dennis Trout, ABC News, at the Federal Courthouse in Baltimore.

JENNINGS: So how much damage have the Walkers and other American spies done to the United States recently, and what do the Soviets really know about this country's military capability?

ABC's John Martin is on "Special Assignment."

JOHN MARTIN: Right now more Americans are facing trial for espionage than at any time since World War II.

GENERAL RICHARD STILLWELL: From the standpoint of the Soviet Union, there's a sellers' market on secrets.

MARTIN: Soviet intelligence has pulled together many

pieces of the puzzle it faces in trying to understand American military capabilities, from satellites to communications to weapons. The Soviets have been successful in uncovering secrets in two kinds of satellite technology -- photo reconnaissance and electronic eavesdropping.

In 1975, Christopher Boyce sold the Soviets details of the RYOLITE (?) satellite, which listens to phone conversations, radar transmissions, radio signals and missile telemetry.

To this, Jeffrey Prime, an officer in British intelligence, added crucial details.

JAMES BAMFORD: Boyce was able to give away the information on the construction of the satellite, how it works, because he worked for a contractor on that, TRW. Prime was able to give away the information on what the targets were and what our capabilities were in terms of eavesdropping.

MARTIN: Perhaps the most damaging loss in satellite photo reconnaissance was the sale to the Soviets of a manual for the newest Keyhole satellite, KH-11, by a disgruntled former CIA employee, William Campilas. The KH-11 photographs, similar to these taken by an SR-71 reconnaissance plane, reveal what is happening on earth in great detail. With the stolen manual, the Soviet military could have learned how to conceal its movements and installations.

WILLIAM COLBY: Those were telling the Soviets something that presumably they didn't know as to our degree of access through various of these techniques. And I'd say they were quite damaging.

MARTIN: At the same time, the Soviets were piecing together elements of another important part of American security, military communications.

GENERAL STILLWELL: They want to read our mail, sir, or read or electronic mail. It's been a target, a priority target for them from the very beginning.

MARTIN: And they have succeeded. From the Pueblo, captured off North Korea, they got a series of encrypting machines used to send secret information back to the United States. From Christopher Boyce and allegedly John Walker and others, they got cryptographic keys to unscramble the codes and with it an important glimpse at U. S. communications.

The Soviets have also gotten documents describing an important array of American weapons. From William Bell, an engineer at Hughes Aircraft, they reportedly got sensitive

information on a series of radar systems for tanks, fighters and the Stealth bomber.

GENERAL STILLWELL: That ranks as one of the more spectacular losses that we've had in the past decade. No question about it, again primarily with respect to your air-to-air missile, the whole missilry. It permits them to devise electronic countermeasures that may assist in defeating that system.

MARTIN: The Soviets got another piece of the puzzle when they learned about U. S. ballistic missile defenses and ICBM survivability from documents they bought from James Harper, a computer engineer.

Even so, for all Soviet espionage managed to learn, has the balance of security been altered?

GENERAL STILLWELL: We are ahead technologically, sir. But we want to maintain that lead. That lead is diminishing because of the loss of our technology to them.

MARTIN: But a game so serious that intelligence committees from both houses of Congress are now investigating the latest series of espionage cases. Their principal goal is to find ways of protecting American secrets from the kind of exposure that has already damaged national security.

John Martin, ABC News, Washington.